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The White Rose

And a Medley of Themes

BY
JOHN KEARNES WHITE

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To My Mother

—from whom I received my ideal of womanhood
—this volume is respectfully dedicated.

—THE AUTHOR.

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The White Rose and Other Love Themes.

THE WHITE ROSE.

I.

By far too lovely to be cast away,
Too fair to perish on the dull ash-tray,
I pity deeply, deeply, but I—well,
I cannot wear it on my coat lapel.

And so I'll keep it in a slender glass
Of limpid water, while the dead days pass,
And let it linger its abnormal life,
Unlit by glamor but unswayed by strife.

II.

I saw it growing while too young to wear,
And, waiting patiently, I left it there.
I thought how proudly I should pluck it when
Its beauty, ripened more, should ravish men.

And how I'd wear it just a little while,
And then in water see its magic smile;
Again with joy should place it on my breast;
Again in placid water let it rest.

And thus I'd give my rose such tender care—
My garden queen, so rich, superb and rare—
That never one of all the flower clan
Had such a happy marriage with a man.

But when to-day I went to cull the prize,
He swiftly snatched it from beneath my eyes.
He seized it roughly in his eager grasp,
Regardless of a stinging thorn-point's rasp.

"A spicy woman's ready wit," he said,
(The while his sorely wounded finger bled),
"The kind I fancy and the only kind—
A bright-edged temper and a brighter mind."

He smiled and lightly pledged a mocking troth,
And pinned his half-crushed victim to the cloth
Of woody texture and of slaty gray—
His well-known dress—his more than well-known way.

And twice again this mortal day I've seen
The vicious, lurking thorn-point, thrusting keen,
Draw beads of blood as he essayed to smell
The rude-clasped rosebud on his coat lapel.

And now in fury he has flung it down,
The satin petals like a crumpled gown.
Half wilted, weary, quivering and bruised,
It used him only as itself was used.

'Tis not of beauty altogether shorn;
It still can brighten and can still adorn;
No other flower in the garden grows
That half that martyr's fragrant fairness knows.

I still can love it and can still admire,
But another, wearing it, has slain desire.
'Tis sweet to think its peace I may restore—
'Tis fiercely bitter to imagine more.

III.

We both have fancied it a woman wed.
Her finest senses, then, alas, are dead—
Slow-smothered by the gross, insensate weight
Of one astute convention called "her mate."

Of one whose brain must be engraved with scenes
Of many an intimate act that means
The dearest value woman's love may lend,
Or woman's high, disdainful pride defend.

IV.

A goddess fallen and her shrine profaned!
Her temple scorned, its fairest marble stained!
I came to worship and I go to weep
And let the shame-drugged goddess ever sleep.

For should I linger at the tainted shrine,
I'd know it never could be cleanly mine.
From every whispering corner I should hear:
"Another, a despoiler, has been here.

"His gaze, unworshiping, has entered all
The chambers compassed by the sacred wall;
His hand, unwashen, has been laid upon
The virgin whiteness of the Holy One."

And in the taking of each vinted sip,
I'd know the cup had touched another lip—
A lip that knew no hallowed sweetness blent
With reverence in the solemn sacrament.

V.

Ah! had he been a zealous devotee
Who, kneeling in the fane, preceded me,
Then had the goddess still been true and high,
And held her shining station in the sky.

For then no mind-debasement would have been
Her portion, nor the signal, fatal sin
Of blunted senses or of lowered pride—
The violated virtues of a bride.

For love, the chemic force that turns to gold
The dross of life and fills the earthen mould
Of grossness with so delicate a flow
Of feeling, melted in the furnace glow

Of passion glorified and wholly freed
Of loathsome meaning, would have been her meed—
And love alone can savor and can save
The chastity of marriage from its grave.

As 'twas, she learned his dearth of faith and love,
And her love, scorning his false shadow of
Affection, died; and then she filled with him
Humiliation's chalice to the brim,

And drank it, drank it bitterly and long,
Inflicted on her soul the One Great Wrong,
And called it "duty"—this repulsive thing—
And deemed it sanctified by book and ring.

But more and more her dagger-pointed tongue
His hardened, coarsened fibre stabbed and stung,
Till venom, hate and passion-mated pain
Aroused that last wild tempest in his brain.

And then divorce! The weighty word of law
(While all the world was hushed in breathless awe):
"For minds diverse, and tempers not alike,
These irksome bonds asunder I will strike."

Had she, when her love died, *herself* divorced,
Her Higher Right of Womanhood enforced,
Ah, then a fairer story I should write—
Of one who still was clean and pure and white.

'Tis now too late; the tragic battle's done;
The soul is beaten and the flesh has won.
'Tis futile now to stigmatize or blame—
She knows her wrongs but not her vivid shame.

VI.

I will not bosom his discarded flower
To think of *him* through every scented hour!
I feel the blighted rose's clinging spell,
But cannot wear it on my coat lapel.

THE LOVE THAT DEMANDS.

This is the love of the one,
Cool and balanced and fair,
Who preys on the heart, as the Hun
Laid the gardens of Italy bare;
Whose smile of approval is rare
As the minist'ring touch of her hands,
Or the drying of tears with her hair—
This is the love that demands.

This is the death that's begun
When the wheat feels the touch of the tare,
When love feels a lack of the sun
And the breast feels a want of the air;
When wisdom and prudence declare—
What slowly belief understands—
That, like a wolf in its lair,
This is the love that demands.

This is the murder that's done
When the soul of a man is at prayer,
When he worships "the love he has won,"
Ere his bosom has learned to beware
Of revealing its pain or its care
To the eyes that are testing the bands
Of the power that is holding him there—
This is the love that demands.

ENVOY.

This is the love that will dare
To strain and unravel the strands
Of a cord that must break in despair—
This is the love that demands.

THE ENCHANTED SAIL.

We drifted in a boat of pearl
Upon a breathing sea;
The sands upon the shore were gold—
Or so they seemed to be.

A glory in the purple west,
The gleaming of a star,
A radiance on the flooding tide
That foamed upon the bar.

Enchanted lay the land and sea,
Enchanted hung the sky,
But one enchantment only held
My worship-lighted eye;

And that enchantment came of her
Who sailed the boat with me,
Whose fingers trailed a rippling wake
Of magic on the sea.

THE BROWN POOL.

As the loon and crane their vigil keep
O'er the water weird and still and deep,
The listless days drift idly by
To the sound of the autumn zephyr's sigh
And the bittern's intermittent cry.
Ah, me!

The old canoe swings sadly there
To the root of the leaning cypress, where
In the fresh, glad days She came to me.
Ah, the sweet, cool shade of that cypress tree,
And, ah, the days that were fair and free!
Ah, me! Ah, me! Ah, me!

And all that is left (in a locket rare)
Is a curling wisp of gold-brown hair;
But clear on memory's mirror lies
The fadeless sheen of her wistful eyes—
A love-light, lit till the dear dead rise.
Ah, me! Ah, me!

As they leaned on the bulwark they dreamed,
While the shadows lay on the sea.
Ah, they dreamed so tender a dream—
Did the two—'neath a pale star's beam,
While the shadows lay on the sea.

Then they stood at the prow and dreamed
When the wind rose over the sea.
Yes, they dreamed a 'wildering dream,
To the orient lightning's gleam,
When the wind rose over the sea.

And they clung to the helm and dreamed
When the storm swept down on the sea.
Oh, they dreamed a perilous dream,
('Twas a glorious, godlike dream),
Of the things that never could be.

For the world would bitterly jeer
At their panting, passionate plea,
And would answer their vision with creeds,
With mocking and scurrilous screeds,
Did they utter their dream of the sea.

But their hearts could never undream
The things that they dreamed on the sea,
And they would not, they could not seem
To the world to forget their dream—
Their dream that was born of the sea;

So nothing was left to be done
(To number their souls with the free)
But to steer to the heart of the storm—
To the thunderous heart of the storm—
And to sink in the swirl of the sea.

But they sealed in a flask their dream,
Which they flung on the racing sea;
And they bended their heads to pray
That a later, happier Day
Might enshrine their dream of the sea.

MY LADY.

I know not how to speak fair words,
My lady;
I know not deftly how to trace,
With skilful touch and finished grace,
The classic outlines of your face,
My lady;

But, Oh, my heart is true to you,
My lady;
As true as writing to the scroll,
As true as fire is to the coal,
Aye, true as life is to the soul,
My lady.

Would not this be enough for you,
My lady?
Oh, may not sturdy trueness be
Itself an all-sufficient plea
To win your own true self to me,
My lady?

THE ABSENT KNIGHT.

In purpling clouds the sun falls low,
And slowly fades the crimson glow
    Of the gently dying day.
The young moon hangs, tip-tilted high,
In the varying blue of the evening sky,
    And the hushed lark flies away.

My thought outwings the swift bird's flight
And bears thee, love, a sad good-night
    O'er the still and shadowy sea.
I breathe a sigh to the darkened moor,
And enter and close the broad oak door—
    To dream and dream of thee.

PASSION.

A darkened dome spreads wide above
The softly brilliant stars of love;
The fitful, flashing fireflies light
Their courses through the murmurous night.

A languid waft of nectared air
Thro' faintly fragrant dusky hair;
A wav'ring sound of pensive sighs,
The glow of liquid, love-lit eyes;

A touch of slender finger-tips,
Trembling, parted, passionate lips—
And life and death amount to this:
A clasp, a thrill, a burning kiss.

PARTED.

It was morning when I saw you,
Morning, fresh and fair and bright.
Now I see you not, 'tis night.

I was young, almost as you were,
Young and hopeful, strong and bold.
Now—I'm weary, hopeless, old.

It was life to feel your glances,
Drink the fragrance of your breath.
That was life, and this—is death.

Far, far,
Shines the star
That leads to glory and to war.
Near, near,
Bright and clear,
Beam the eyes to him so dear.

And a day finds him kneeling and pleading,
With the eyes turned coldly away.
And a day finds him wounded and bleeding
On the field of the purple Lochray.

BLOWN KISSES.

In the gloaming, love, I know,
When the shifting breezes blow,
That they whirl a cloud of incense
In my face;

That the fairies of the air,
From your mouth and cheeks and hair,
Bring my lips a draught of nectar—
With your grace.

GRAY ASHES.

The glint of the morning sunlight
Has nought of the brightness of yore;
The trill of the matin songster
Arouses the pulses no more.

The hope of the lover ended,
The joy of the living is flown—
The hand of the dying reaping
The harvest that others have sown.

THE QUEEN.

I know that when I call her queen they jeer
Among themselves—but not to me! They fear
My strength of arm—the men; the women—well,
They do not jeer, but why I cannot tell.

She *is* a queen! They say her hair is "poor."
Her hair! Her lustrous hair that I adore!
"Her eyes are dull," they say. My God, her eyes!
Where all my vivid, ardent heaven lies!

"Her face," they say (these fools and blind!), "her face"
(So full of light and love!), "is commonplace!"
And they! Ye gods above! And what are they?
The clods, the very clods of common clay!

By all the fashion of her regal head,
By every grace she is the highest bred.
And yet (these dullards!) they have never seen
The royal beauty of my splendid queen!

A SUMATRAN LOVE.

You are mine!
By the whisper of the zephyrs,
By the murmur of the water,
By the shadows of the forest;
By the long deserted altar
Of that sacred, leafy temple;
By the sanction of the solemn
Midnight moon.

You are mine!
By the untamed pulse of Nature;
By her free, untrammeled passion;
By the setting of the current
Of the all-converging forces—
Of the forces so relentless,
Irresistible, unswerving!
You are mine!

You are mine!
You may shiver, moan and flutter;
You may strive and strain and struggle.
You may yield to tyrant Duty;
You may kiss his chain of iron,
With its baleful, cruel glitter,
But its links shall never bind you.
You are mine.

You are mine!
Not another shall possess you,
Never other arms enfold you;
For my dagger knows its lesson,
Knows the breast of him who claims you,
Knows the red path to his heart-beats!
He shall never, never have you.
You are *mine!*

A Medley

INSPIRATION.

I gaze into the purple of the Past
To see a colonnade of all that's vast—
The tombs of Kings and monuments of Time—
To fill my soul with dreams, aglow, sublime.

I look on all the brilliance of To-day,
That stirs the mind to ever active play,
And wonder oft if this shall end it all,
If we have heard the Muses' final call.

But no! High Reason holds that this is nought,
The faint and filmy shadow of a thought—
The mighty Thought the golden Future veils
To tell in all the coming years of tales.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE AGES.

Can you name me this woman, tall and fair,
(With lustre of starlight still in her hair
And ling'ring glory of night in her eyes,)
Who stands in the path of the clear sunrise?

Her form is a cast from the welded mold
Of the tense To-day and the Days of Old;
As she stands the embodied heritage
Of the centered Best of every age.

For a murmur of love is on her lips,
A poem of grace in her curving hips,
Th' enfolded Thought of a world in her brow,
And the human race in her Marriage Vow.

A LOVE SONG.

Oh! give me a song, my God, I pray,
A song of the truest art;
A song of hope, a song of the day;
A song for a weary Heart;

A song of joy, a song of life,
A song of a tender grace;
A song to cheer, in its daily strife,
The Soul of the Human Race.

THE PASSING OF KATIE O'SHEA.

Oh, Katie O'Shea was a gladsome sight,
With hair as dark as the wing o' night,
And Irish eyes in a dance o' light—
Till she went in the mill.

She swept along at a quick-step gait,
Without demur, without debate,
All ready to grapple with any fate—
Yes, even the mill.

The crowding lads caught step with her
(Without debate, without demur)—
A step that started the pulse astir—
To the door o' the mill.

A soother of pain and healer of strife,
She bore the marks of a good man's wife—
A promised fountain o' sweet child life—
But—she went in the mill.

The grim wheels whirred in their old, old way
In the linted air, and day by day
The life went out of Katie O'Shea
While she worked in the mill.

Oh, many a wistful, fluttering sigh
Died on her lips as years went by
And dimmed the lustre o' cheek and eye
In the tireless mill.

Her step no longer stirred the blood
Of lads who'd worshipped her womanhood,
And Katie saw it and understood
And—stayed in the mill.

She could not leave; there were "mouths to feed,"
Brothers, sisters, many a need,
The "Wolf" that threatened with famished greed
The slaves o' the mill.

So nothing awaited the life she gave,
Nor the love that kept her firm and brave,
But an early rest in a quiet grave
In the shade o' the mill.

Oh, brother mine, have pity, I pray;
For in the cloth you wear to-day
Is wov'n the soul of Katie O'Shea,
Who died in the mill.

Have pity, yes, for her fate demands
The dauntless power of knightly hands
To strangle the death that ever stands
In ev'ry mill.

Ah, few will level the lance in rest
To fight in cause of maids oppress,
When rags, not pearls, adorn the breast
—And they work in the mill!

THEY THAT TAKE THE SWORD.

The prophet in the days of long ago
Uttered the changeless truth that they who sow
Shall reap the harvest of their scattered seed—
Shall gather death for ev'ry ruthless deed.

And One of even taller stature said
(As shadows of the olive branches fled
Before the flaring torches)—hear the word!—
"Who takes the sword shall perish by the sword!"

And not alone shall perish by its edge,
Its weight compels a nation's golden pledge.
Its stern demand is heard at ev'ry door
For men and money, more and ever more.

And workers must their wages tax and tithe,
While they in pain must pant and toil and writhe
To pay the nation's bonds they never own—
To pay and pay and bear and bear and groan.

To war a greater toll must man supply:
The sleeping passions that should ever lie
Asleep till dead, are roused and loosed to slay
The gentler impulse of our Kindlier Day.

The screaming fury or the snarling hate
Of beast and savage then may find its mate
In bosoms that had just begun to feel
The force of wide humanity's appeal.

Oh, Spain and Russia, Italy and France!
Ye have taken the sword and sown the lance;
Oh, speak ye, speak, in God's name say
What reap ye, what is the price ye pay?

THE ANSWER.

"Upon the breaking of the daily bread,
Upon the shoulders of the underfed—
The weary nerve, the heart, the aching head—
The weighty pressure of the sword is laid,
The cost in coin of the soul is paid,
And burdened nations perish 'neath the blade."

THE RED FLAG.

[Republished by permission of "Wilshire's Mazagine."]

In the grasp of the sweaty hands of toil,
It stands for those who are near the soil;
By the might of its bearers lifted high,
It signals hope in a hopeless sky.

A flutter of red in the crowded streets
Of Petersburg the Cossack greets,
And the bases of th' Imperial throne
Are shaken by a nation's groan.

To the German Kaiser a doomful thing,
A dream of gloom to th' Emperor-King,
A threatening fate to every crown,
To bishop's mitre and priestly gown.

In face of the masters of all the world
The flag of the Red Revolt's unfurled;
Forever the sign of insurgent blood
And symbol of Human Brotherhood.

THE DYING PONTIFF.

[Written at the time of Pope Leo XIII's death.]

The Pope is dying, dying,
  While the world stands watching by.
There's in many a breast an aching
  And in many a heart a cry,
While the pale lips moan and mutter
And the pulse-beats faintly flutter
And the moments pause and falter
  As they fly.

The Noble Guards a-glitter
  And the Knights in black and white
With the Church's crimson princes
  In the softly glowing light.
Fragrant incense, solemn chanting,
While the failing breath is panting
'Mid the purple pomp and splendor
  Of the night.

Confession! Hark, he whispers!
  What the sins that he'll confess
While the pallid groups are wond'ring
  In their hushed and awed distress?
Absolution. Now communion.
'Tis the sad, sad last reunion
Of the Papal court and household
  He will bless.

There are kings uneasy, anxious
For a message from that bed.
What successor? Who will follow
When the Pontiff's soul has fled?
Brief their period of waiting,
Brief their doubt and dread debating,
For the eyes are closed—forever—
He is dead!

THE PIG-STICKERS.

[NOTE.—These lines were written during the Boer War, anent the famous story by a British officer of a cavalry attack on a party of Boers. The officer declared that it was "better sport than pig-sticking"; that he saw a soldier with one stroke drive his lance through two Boers who were fleeing on the same horse, and that the attack resulted in "the bagging of sixty or more."]

We're great H'anglo-Saxon deliv'rers,
The soldiers of freedom and light.
We're h'up-to-date shackle removers—
The sons of the gospel of might.

We lick all the 'eathen h'indunas
And make 'em h'acknowledge defeat,
Then give 'em the right to obey us,
And—well, to crouch down at our feet.

We 'eard as 'ow the Boers was fightin'—
The sauvage, h'uncivilized guys,
The bloody and bloomin' h'oppressors—
And *we* fixed a 'ummin' supprise.

We rode through the ranks of the Dutchers
And shoved in the 'ead of the lance—
A lesson in 'igh civ'lization,
In progress and Saxon h'advance!

They 'owled and they pleaded for mercy,
But h'orders is h'orders you know.
So we finished 'em, two at a stickin',
And our bag was—well, sixty or so.

THE KING.

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[NOTE.—In a recent conversation it was remarked that what Socialism needed now was a crystallizing personality—a dazzling leader of superlative heart and brain endowments, a kind of Christ and Napoleon combined, a natural King of men, but not an official one; a man whose love of mankind fired him with a crusader's zeal, and who could combine, concentrate and triumphantly use the ethical and material forces of Socialism at present in existence. It was replied that Socialism least of all movements needed brilliant leaders to insure final success; that its own force and weight carried it forward. That its essential principle—namely, Socialism—forbade the possibility of permanent triumph for the movement except as this principle should permeate the human mass; should enlighten it, enthuse it, uplift it and place it on the throne of its own destinies; that mankind as a whole must become its own King.]

I.

Arise, O King, in your might,
In the glory and strength of your clan;
Put on the purple of Right,
The royal ermine of Man.

The ages have waited for you,
The day of your Kingdom is now.
O, come with your soul firm and true!
O, come with your sword and your vow!

With the cry of a Christ in your heart,
And a Corsican's crown on your head—
With leadership's masterful art
For the armies that wait to be led.

The marshaling hastens apace,
And the ranks are serried and strong.
You are called to be head of a Race,
In the battle of Man against Wrong.

O, come, for the banners are spread,
(While the captains are shouting their calls)
The glorious Banners of Red
That threaten the enemies' walls.

We wait for the Leader to come,
For the strength that his coming will bring.
We wait, to the roll of the drum,
But where, O where is the King?

II.

Behold now the sovereign is found!
The unseen Messiah is here!
With his thorn-circled diadem crowned,
With his smile and his pitying tear.

His love is the quick pulse that leaps
In the veins of the lost for the lost—
The beating of hearts in the deeps,
The sighing of souls tempest tossed.

His might is the power of the hand
That presses the lever of steam,
That fashions the white-heated brand,
That places the high balanced beam.

III.

With the well mastered forces of life,
And the merging of class within class;
With the ending of ignorant strife,
Comes the Reign of Mankind in the mass.

There is Kingship in justice and ruth,
It is royal to live and be kind;
And the corridored dwelling of Truth
Is the wide-windowed palace of Mind.

Thus endeth inimical Fate,
Thus endeth the Visions of Dread,
Thus endeth the Gospel of Hate—
With the unequal Breaking of Bread.

Humanity, masters of toil,
Humanity, learning to sing,
Humanity, lords of the soil,
United Humanity—King!

All Hail to the King who has come
In the glory and strength of his clan,
Who treads to the joy-beating drum:
All Hail to His Majesty—Man!

THE OLD *REGIME.*

Long years have slowly passed,
Each more and more a dream;
A dream of all the vast
And gilded old *regime.*

The world is rushing by,
With all its glint and gleam;
But life is one long sigh
For the joyous old *regime.*

"These are the better days";
But sad to me they seem;
As I think of courtly ways
In times of the old *regime.*

And when my life shall feed
No longer the candle's beam,
The gate of the grave will lead
To the home of the old *regime.*

THE POET'S LAMENT.

With staggering step I struggle along,
Half distraught 'neath the burden of song
That leashes and thralls my quivering brain,
As it whips my heart with its lash of pain;

As it drags the best of my life away
To fling to the world in a feeble lay—
The weakling child of an anxious sire,
The perishing ash of an ardent fire.

Ah! hopeless my wishing for other men
To see all the vision that I have seen,
To hear the full sound of the thrilling word
That my ear and fancy and heart have heard.

W 23

JAN 13 1989